

Cripps's Corner. Forest Ave. Sunon.

Oct. 20 29

My dear Fisher

I read your Reclit-aside yesterday with some care, though I have not yet fully absorbed it. You know that I agree heartily with all the family allowances part, and the whole of it made me think hard. At first I decided not to write to you because I feel my views are not fixed, but, on second thoughts I decided to do so, as it is probably now or never.

I have been in the habit of regarding things as follows. The use of machinery has enabled one man to produce more food. Hence men had to leave the country, this movement being increased by the manufacture of agricultural tools in towns. Conservatism resulted in wages being lower in the country, a difference compared to town wages <sup>being produced</sup> which is slowly lessening. Everything became cheaper in like manner, but all men sought and generally got employment. The number of men employed in agriculture as compared with the numbers in other callings is an index of the expenditure on other things besides food, and therefore of the standard of living. If you turn your diagram on

bad grammar

p. 45 upside down, it seems to me to give a rough measure of the rise in the standard of living. Looked at thus it does not seem as 'serious' as you make it <sup>out</sup> to be. Looking to the future it will go on. The advantage of cheap nitrogen will be, besides more production, less labour for what is produced. I forgot to say above that I see far more desire to go from country to town than vice versa.

On p 54 you <sup>say</sup> that it might be wise in the interest of smiting cultivators to restrict the area of growth — as was attempted with india rubber. This <sup>may be</sup> true, but it is protection, and like all protection, it injures others. It may not be true as regards labour, which I think becomes apparent if rent is taken into account. The men thrown out of work by the restriction of area, or not getting work, would tend to keep down wages. The rise in prices would raise rents. The net result might be no rise in the standard of living of labour and a greater differentiation of wealth. I don't know what it would be.

We have to face the fact that town life is going to predominate, and to try to make it everywhere as healthy and cheerful as it is

in our best form.

I have been trying to think what meaning I should attach to certain expressions. The over-production of goods would generally mean, I think, the production of goods which had to be sold at a loss. This would always be due to a mistake in estimates. It would never be a permanent situation. It would be the same in regard to food, if over-production is used in this sense. If the phrase means production such as tends to lower prices, I see nothing to say where it begins or ends.

To over-population I can give a certain not too definite meaning. If we imagine a population increasing from zero, I suppose at first, on the principle of increasing returns as explained in text books, prices would fall. They would go on falling up to a point, and then begin to rise; and the standard of living would rise and fall similarly. Where the change took place would be the optimum population. I assume knowledge not to change. But with a change in knowledge it is probable that the optimum for today would not tend to produce the optimum in the future. How to take the future into account theoretically I

do not see.

You speak of the development of the British Empire, and I think some of my father's words in (?) The Descent of Man could be quoted in support of this view. I cannot make up my mind how much I would sacrifice our present standard of living for this object. I would go some way. But, if we do so, let us be open, and declare plainly that over-population is what we want, so as to have numbers ready to go abroad.

On a few minor points. White men have known and inhabited tropical West Africa for 400 years. Why has not this potential food-supply area been developed? I think there must be some solid reason. Chinese and Indian civilizations have for far longer been close to underdeveloped tropical areas. Do coffee, cotton & tobacco flourish in where tropical forest are thickest? I thought not.

My manufacturing firm did not speculate beyond what was well in sight when considering capital expenditure. I think few firms are built up on longer speculations.

As to p 56, I regard the fall in the death rate as the most potent cause of the fall in the birth rate, contraception having made the coincidence take place ~~more~~ much more rapidly, and done a little more in addition. I guess you would agree.

With regard to over-population, it seems to me that, accepting my definition, all Europe is probably much over-populated. By cutting off the industries producing lowest returns and throwing the worst land out of cultivation, would not the standard of living rise?

When the coal gives out, then we shall certainly be over-populated. How will this begin to show itself? Will it not be by unemployment? That seems to me the best rough test we can get for over-population, and I am sorry to see it discredited. Waves of unemployment will occur always, but how can we tell it is only a wave? Is it not best to keep this practical test well before our eyes?

No more bother you today. This at all ways shows that what you say has set me thinking ~~very~~ hard

Yours sincerely,

Samuel Darwin

No answer needed